

Ouija Boards, Tool of the Devil or Toy of Parker Bros?

Ouija Boards have been a part of popular culture for the past century. There are those who contend that there is something paranormal about it. First, we must ask ourselves a series of questions in order to determine if that's true. Who invented the Ouija Board and when? The origins can reveal much to us about the game's true purpose. Is the Ouija board just a game, or is it really a way of communicating with the deceased? Are there experiments and explanations that can truly test this paranormal phenomenon? Should we take personal testimonials seriously? Should we take the warnings from Christian Evangelists about this game seriously or not? If there is, or isn't, something paranormal about the Ouija Board, what should we do about it?

The Ouija Board was patented and developed in 1892 by William Fuld who owned a company called the Kenneyard Novelty Company, which was later renamed the Ouija Novelty Company. In 1927, he died while supervising the repair of one of his factories. Now, it may seem that Fuld's death has nothing to do with the supposed paranormal powers of the Ouija Board, but I thought it might be worth mentioning since if the game really was a tool of the Devil, one might wonder why the Prince of Darkness would wait 35 years to kill Fuld. If the purpose was to corrupt the heart of America's spirituality during the 19th century and beyond, then the Devil would have fared better if he had kept cocaine, heroin or opium legal instead of conceiving of a some cardboard game with letters and numbers that would become taboo once the spiritualism movement of the Victorian era died out. In fact, it might as well be said that some of these people who were driven insane or "possessed" by the Ouija Board were probably drug addicts, or who were suffering from various side effects from the drugs such as hallucinations, without even realizing it. Cocaine was present, in small traces, in Coca-Cola when

it first came out; opium wasn't banned, for both recreational and "medicinal" purposes, in the United States until the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914 and even after then, there were still black markets that thrived to supply the current generation's need for the drug. Again, if Satan wanted to corrupt the spiritual heart of America, or the morality of its people, then it would have been best if some of these narcotics were still being distributed and consumed by people young and old. History, and common sense, gives us the first clue to the background history of the Ouija Board and its association with the devil...none.

If the Ouija board can indeed be used to contact the dead who can provide us with details of the past and future then surely they can be used to acquire present day information such as missing details from written wills, where their deceased loved ones kept their diaries, or where is the television remote control? However, if spirits cannot give you present day information then how do they know the past and the future? It is not logically possible for a spirit to give his/her living friend past information about missing details of paragraph X of will Y but yet, cannot get the correct series of numbers or letters off of a piece of paper (which was not read by the players of the Ouija Board) which was written less than two minutes ago.

To test whether or not the Ouija Board works, you would need to perform the following steps:

First, set up an Ouija Board session with three or more people, plus you the host, and use the board for a single session. Once that session is over, go to a different room and write down, on a piece of paper, a sequence of numbers or a word. Do not reveal what you have written down to any of the players and do not participate in the next session. Ask the players, who then in turn ask the board, what you have written down and record the results.

There are several experiments to test the powers of the Ouija Board and the one above is pretty simple. Another variation involves the use of blindfolds.

First, set up an Ouija Board session with three or more people, plus you the host, and use the board for a single session. Once that session is over, exclude yourself out of the next session, have the rest of the participants wear blindfolds (ones that you cannot see through) and turn the board around 180 degrees. Record the results.

Another popular experiment to try out is to place a Bible on top of an Ouija Board. There's a myth that the Ouija Board rejects the Bible and "pushes" it out. Put the Ouija Board and the Bible in a room and lock the window and door of that room, to prevent sabotage. If you want, you can have a video camera record this experiment. I would say if the Bible didn't move for a week, then it is safe to say that nothing is going to happen.

Assuming that the experiments show no signs of paranormal phenomenon; there is a simple, scientific explanation, which requires no mystical and mystifying mysticism, for people who believe the planchette is moving on its own. In a nutshell, the ideomotor effect involves the involuntary, or unconscious, movement of someone's muscles. This also explains the phenomenon of pendulum swinging, dowsing and many other such forms of divination. If there's anything revealing in the course of our collective knowledge of human psychology, it should be noted that we can be deceived by ourselves. To claim that this form of deception nullifies my explanation of the phenomenon of the Ouija Board is to ignore the evidence against the game and to imply that since we can deceive ourselves into believing anything, then any scientific arguments against the Ouija Board is false. To make the latter

claim is contradictory for you are using a scientific fact, which is that humans can be deceived by themselves, to debunk a scientific explanation, which is that humans are being deceived through the ideomotor effect, for the supposed powers of the Ouija Board.

When the metaphysical and pseudoscientific explanations fail to explain away the results of these experiments, promoters from both the New Age and Christian Evangelist camps resort to personal testimonials, or anecdotes, in order to support their beliefs surrounding the powers of the Ouija Board. Personal testimonials fail on many levels because of a variety of factors including confirmation bias, ignoring minor but vitally important details (such as playing outside in 40-50 mph winds), dishonesty (publicity and instant fame and all of that), insanity and delusion. By the way, delusion and insanity are not the same things. To be deluded is to be deceived, whether by illusions or outright deception.

Take for an example one of my friend's personal experiences, with her sister, while using the Ouija Board. She claims that, while using the board, her sister became overly aggressive. However, she fails to realize, and remember, other personal experiences with her sister including numerous pranks that range from the seemingly innocent to the throwing of fruits and vegetables. Oh, and she mentioned on other accounts that her sister was a bit of a sore loser. In short, my friend's sister was a bit of a demon to begin with but, she doesn't seem to add the two together. This is an example of confirmation bias, the ignorance of past contradictory and conflicting evidence. It might as well be inferred that the sister, who probably had knowledge about the myths of the game, has intentionally acted aggressive to scare her which is not really that different from an older brother telling his younger brother scary stories in the night. Or, perhaps, when the sister asked a personal question about her appearance or chances of marriage or what kind of boyfriend she might have etc., the response was not what she had hoped for.

Even if we were to take personal testimonials into account, there would still be conflicts that can be found between different stories. For an example, “I was contacted by spirits using that game for 5 years” versus, “Nothing happened to me while using that board for 5 years.” Which one should we believe and why? Why should we take the first one seriously and not the second, or vice versa? You will get nowhere by relying on anecdotal evidence to support your beliefs.

Up to this point, one should consider whether or not the common wisdom from Christian Evangelists about Ouija Boards should be taken seriously. I say, yes and no. It is true that people, who honestly believe and invest their lives in, who uses the Ouija Board are not solving their problems when it comes to coping with death or the unknown, rather it cheapens the experience of life. However, to believe that you can be possessed by demons, or the devil himself, by playing this game is, according to the results from the above experiments, just as irrational as believing that communication with the afterlife is possible through a mass produced board game that was patented and conceived in an era where charlatans and hoodwinkers, such as the Fox Sisters, cheated their audiences into believing that they had such powers of communication. These truths, along with the fact that the game is currently being mass produced by a company that gave us Monopoly, should be a godsend for the evangelists in their battle with the New Age movement. Needless to say, sources such as allabouttheoccult.org and conservapedia.com, have failed *miserably* to latch onto this concept successfully and the fact that the phrase “Ouija encounter” comes up with 750k hits on google only adds to my hypothesis that superstition is still strong towards this game. Instead of showing what the Ouija Board really is they instead--whether intentionally for personal gain or unintentionally due to superstition and/or ignorance-- promote the paranormal and the demons that they hunt by claiming the game to be a gateway to hell.

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